

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and Members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on school choice in House Bill 33 on March 16, 2023.

My name is Wezlynn Davis and I live in Jerome Township, Ohio. I am a small business owner and Township Trustee, but I come before you today to testify not in those capacities, but as a parent of two school-age children, a second grader and a fourth grader, who attend Dublin City Schools.

I have a child who suffers from dyslexia, a learning disability that affects one in five children in Ohio. Collectively, that accounts for approximately 340,000 of the 1.7M students in Ohio's school systems. Currently, the Dublin School District only has 17 teachers certified to instruct children suffering from dyslexia. If one in five kids suffer from this learning disability, that means 3,400 students across Dublin's 22 schools have a need that is being filled by only 17 teachers. 200 kids per teacher. The district has chosen not to fill this gaping need with contractors but instead, requires its teachers to be trained with a certification which takes years to achieve. Why is this important? Because if one of the purportedly "best school districts in Ohio" is unable to respond to the needs of the students, where are we leaving the one in five who languish in underperforming districts? Meanwhile, educators all over this state, including Dublin, agree that the learning gaps were exacerbated by children with disabilities during the pandemic.

Why is this important for your subcommittee? Because my experience is not unique. Coming out of a pandemic, we all can find silver-linings. After school closings, 3 years later we know more than ever that the 1 in 5 are behind and are struggling terribly; the window to make long-term and meaningful impacts is closing the older these children get. The silver-lining is the knowledge of this and that the current system is not working for a minimum of 340,000 children across Ohio. You have been presented with the honor to champion forward what invests directly in them. The universal application of this bill ensures that no child is set up for failure in a school that cannot meet their needs and ensures that state resources go to fund our most important resource – our children - rather than systems. They will one day take our places in our roles of authority, expertise, and governance- it will be a shame to be in a position to have to explain ourselves to our leaders, later. It's time that Ohio tries a revolutionary student-centric approach to school funding that doesn't pour funds to districts which are unable to meet the needs of a student, whether it be academically, socially or for some special need. Much like choosing a pediatrician, parents are in the best position to decide what education system responds to the needs of their unique child, and I ask that you give Ohioans that choice by amending the Backpack Bill, House Bill 11, into House Bill 33. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on school choice in House Bill 33.

With gratitude,
Wezlynn Davis